

VZCZCXRO2792
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHIL #4386/01 0761218
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171218Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2472
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0592
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1343
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 4803
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 7850
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0128
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 8053
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5858
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004386

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PK](#) [IN](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: PUGWASH CONFERENCE: KASHMIRI CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES.

Classified By: Derived from DSCG 05-01, b and d

¶1. (C) Summary: A three-day gathering of Kashmiris, Pakistanis and Indians in Islamabad highlighted the continuing effort of President Musharraf to build support for his peace proposals. The meeting featured a two-and-a-half hour exchange with Musharraf on his ideas for demilitarization, self-government and joint management. Separately, Musharraf met with pro-Indian Kashmiri politician (and member of Parliament) Omar Abdullah, who by all accounts was favorably impressed with Musharraf's flexibility and commitment to peace. On the negative side, the Kashmiris fought bitterly among themselves, with some (including the JKLF's Yasin Malik) stressing the need to include the militants in any peace dialogue. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Kashmiris from both sides of the Line of Control (and the diaspora), representing a range of political positions gathered in Islamabad with Pakistani and Indian politicians and academics for a March 10-12 conference that highlighted the changing dynamics of the Kashmir issue and the deep divisions among Kashmiri groups. The conference was organized by Pugwash, an international organization based in Washington, London, Geneva and Rome, that focuses on security and conflict resolution. Kashmiri leaders included Omar Abdullah (National Conference), Yasin Malik (JKLF), Sajjad Ghani Lone (People's Conference), Mehbooba Mufti (Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party), Sardar Qayyum (Muslim Conference) and Abdul Ghani Bhatt (Muslim Conference -- Indian Kashmir). The three days of meetings proceeded under the rotating chairmanship of Pakistani General (ret.) Talaat Masood (a respected policy analyst and Embassy contact), his Indian counterpart and Pugwash Secretary General Paolo Cotta-Ramusino. Two leaders who were notably absent were Mirwaiz Umar Farooq (APHC) and Syed Ali Geelani. The Mirwaiz's public explanation for his absence was an injury to his ankle, though our colleagues in the diplomatic community suspect that having boycotted an earlier Indian roundtable, the Mirwaiz felt he should boycott this event too.

¶3. (C) On the eve of the conference, PolCouns met with Yasin Malik and several Pakistan-based JKLF leaders. Malik downplayed the significance of the conference, predicting that meetings on the margins would be more important than the session itself. He repeatedly stressed the need to include Kashmiri militant groups in the peace process, saying that he had made the same point to Manmohan Singh. He said he had told Singh that outside of Jammu, India and its supporters (i.e., Omar Abdullah) had "zero support" in Kashmir, and that

for any peace initiative to succeed it would have to draw in militants. He had made the same point directly to moderates like Abdullah who, in his view, were in danger of being seen as Indian appeasers and of losing support in Kashmir.

14. (C) President Musharraf spent two and half hours with the group on the opening day, explaining his proposals for demilitarization, self-governance and joint management of Kashmir. The objective, he said was to find a solution that would not involve redrawing borders or making the Line of Control (LoC) permanent, but to instead make the LoC irrelevant. He stressed that these were simply ideas, and that Pakistan would welcome Indian input but that time was of the essence. Leaders on both sides needed to seize the "fleeting opportunity" for peace.

15. (C) Musharraf also held a separate 45-minute one-on-one with Omar Abdullah, whose visit represented the first trip to Pakistan in recent memory by a leading pro-Indian Kashmiri leader. According to press reports (including The Hindu), Abdullah emerged from the meeting impressed that "Musharraf has shown greater flexibility than Prime Minister Manmohan Singh." He remarked that Musharraf was "the best bet for India to do business with," as he had "shifted from the traditional maximalist position on Kashmir and shown flexibility."

16. (C) Talaat Masood told PolCouns that the actual proceedings of the conference were less important than the opportunity it provided for discussions that would never have happened otherwise. For the first time people who had avoided each other were sitting at the same table. Masood credited the Indian leadership for allowing broad participation.

ISLAMABAD 00004386 002 OF 002

Secondly, according to Masood, the conference had highlighted that "the age of favorites is over" as evidenced by the fact that Pakistan and India had been talking to a range of Kashmiri leaders. Masood noted that Pugwash had been talking to Kashmiri militant groups, including Hizbul-Mujahedin (but not "dangerous groups" like Lashkar e-Tayyiba), and that they too were interested in dialogue. Thirdly, Masood thought it was significant that a number of Indian officials who participated had come away impressed with both Musharraf and Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri, who had hosted a reception on the opening night.

17. (C) Masood observed that the conference had highlighted a significant challenge, namely the divisions among the militant groups. He reported that during one session, the Kashmiris from the diaspora and from both sides of the LoC had been sent into a room to deliberate on possible solutions to the Kashmir conflict, while the Pakistani and Indian delegates were sent into a second room with the same instructions. The latter group came to agreement on some recommendations, while the Kashmiris "could not agree on anything." In part, Masood blamed diaspora Kashmiris, who had created "an industry" out of the Kashmir conflict. However, the Kashmiri "rightists" were also unhelpful because of "insecurities" as they were caught between militant groups on the one hand and an evolving peace effort on the other. As a prominent case in point, he remarked that Yasin Malik was trying to be a champion of the militants, but that militant groups were shunning him out of concern that he was too accommodating on Musharraf's agenda. Masood held Malik largely responsible for blocking the proposed concluding statement of the conference, which would have stated that "violence in all its forms should cease forthwith." (One press report recounts a shouting match on the steps of the Foreign Ministry among Kashmiri participants and members of the Pakistani press corps.)

18. (C) Masood was also concerned that, as he saw it, Musharraf's advisors in the military and intelligence services were "out of sync" with the President himself. Musharraf was much more forward-leaning and flexible than

some of his supporters. Masood considered the Foreign Ministry to be an exception, however, assessing Kasuri's performance with the delegates as "brilliant."

Comment

19. (C) This was the third visit to Pakistan of leading Kashmiris over the past year, following a visit by an APHC delegation last June (that included the Mirwaiz) and a visit by Yasin Malik and others after the October earthquake. The conference nonetheless represented a milestone in that it saw the joint participation of an unprecedented range of Kashmiri groups and included a meeting between Musharraf and a pro-Indian Kashmiri politician. The event also marked a continuation of Musharraf's effort to broaden the constituency in India and Kashmir for his "out of the box" ideas. The anti-conference stance of militant groups, as reported in the press, is also a backhanded indication of its significance. Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen Commander "General" Abdullah called the conference a "sellout" and accused Musharraf of seeking to foist Omar Abdullah on the Kashmiri people. The commander of Al Umar Mujahideen charged Musharraf with damaging the Pakistani cause at American behest and characterized Pugwash as "an attempt to put Kashmir on the back-burner."

CROCKER